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Longer Pub Visits Lift Britain’s Bars

Spending holds steady even as drinks volumes fall, The Oxford Partnership says.

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New data from The Oxford Partnership shows that longer visits and steady spending are helping support performance in Britain’s pubs and bars even as drinking volumes continue to soften.

The group’s April market watch report found that occupancy rose to 65.5%, up 3.4% from a year earlier, while average dwell time increased by 11 minutes to 157 minutes. Average spend per head held at £26.89, close to March’s record level, suggesting consumers are still willing to spend when they go out.

But the report also showed that total drinks volumes fell 2.1% year on year in April, while rate of sale slipped 0.8%. The Oxford Partnership said the figures point to a widening gap between how engaged consumers are with hospitality venues and how much they are actually drinking once there.

The company said moderation remains a clear trend, with customers increasingly treating pubs and bars as places for food, socializing and broader experiences rather than purely for alcohol-led occasions. That shift has helped keep venues busy, but it has also made trading more complicated for operators facing higher costs and weaker consumer confidence.

Category trends reflected those changing habits. Stout remained one of the strongest performers, with volumes up 7.6%, while world lager rose 3.5%. Traditional lager segments continued to struggle, with core lager volumes down 6% and world 4% lager falling 6.7%.

Alison Jordan, chief executive of The Oxford Partnership, said consumers were still making time for hospitality and social occasions remained important, but that people were behaving differently once they arrived. “People are staying longer, venues remain busy and spend levels are holding up well,” she said. “However, higher spend does not automatically mean stronger returns for operators.”

She added that cost pressures remained significant and that consumers were often paying more while drinking less, creating a more complex trading environment than headline figures alone might suggest.

The report said the sector would now be looking to warmer weather and major summer events to turn strong footfall into better drinks sales in the months ahead.